STREET SPIRIT

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JUSTICE NEWS & HOMELESS BLUES IN THE BAY AREA

Sharing Food as a Form of Nonviolent Protest

For Food Not Bombs, sharing food is a direct act of resistance to the violence of hunger and poverty. It's also a nonviolent protest of the corporate state's military and economic violence.

by Lydia Gans

The Occupy movement, like other mass expressions of protest, has been plagued by occasional outbursts of violence, Though undoubtedly fueled by provocateurs, the action in itself presents an occasion for people to physically express their anger.

We live in a culture of violence. For some, it becomes natural to lash out against property, even people. Our government, through its overt and covert wars and attacks on other nations, has constantly sent its citizens the message that it's OK to kill to prove you're right.

But there are many people and organizations committed to nonviolent political action. Many names come to mind as we search history for examples of nonviolent alternatives to violence and warfare. Mohandas Gandhi spent years in jail, and then gave his very life in nonviolent protest against British colonialism. Martin Luther King, Jr. led courageous activists in marching nonviolently for civil rights.

Members of East Bay Food Not Bombs serve food to long lines of people every day in People's Park. Lydia Gans photo

And today, there are many organizations whose fundamental mission is to carry out peaceful protests — for example, protests against homelessness by occupying empty houses, or against hunger by publicly sharing meals together with people who don't have access to sufficient nourishing food.

Nonviolence is one of the fundamental principles of Food Not Bombs. In Berkeley, East Bay Food Not Bombs stages a daily protest against a system that values profits more than people and expresses its values in a supremely nonviolent way — by inviting all who come by to share a meal outdoors in Peoples Park. We are making a public statement that food is a human right, not a commodity.

Sharing food is an appropriate way of creating a culture of nonviolence. In the past, it was customary for families to sit down together for the day's main meal. It was a peaceful time; not a time for argu-

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A Man of Spirit: The Long Journey of Kenneth McCoy

***Street Spirit* vendor Kenneth McCoy exchanges greetings with the people who pass by in downtown Berkeley. "They know me and I know them and they're wonderful people," he declares. "They help me a great deal."**

by Lydia Gans

Kenneth McCoy has been selling the *Street Spirit* since he was diagnosed with colon cancer six years ago and found he had no way to pay for the medicine he would need to survive.

Sitting on an upturned bucket in front of the North Berkeley Post Office, Kenneth exchanges greetings with the people who pass by. "They know me and I know them and they're wonderful people," he declares. "They help me a great deal."

Kenneth grew up near Hayward, "across the tracks," in an unincorporated farming community called Russell City, about 10 miles south of Oakland. Russell City was settled back in 1853 and ceased to exist in 1964 when the last remaining residents were driven out and the small town was replaced by an industrial park.

That wasn't unusual. The industrial parks now dominating the area were built on land taken forcibly from the people who had settled there, mainly African Americans who had migrated from the South. The story is that the residents tried to fight the removal and many of the buildings were destroyed by acts of arson.

Prior to the mass expulsion of all its residents, Russell City was a community of more than 1,200 people, mostly families with children. It was known for its little farms, modest homes, and small-town feel — including dirt floors and bootlegged electricity in some residences.

The largely African-American community also drew many blues musicians. Russell City's thriving legacy of Delta Blues led to the founding of the annual Hayward/Russell City Blues Festival. Such renowned blues masters as Big Mama Thornton and Big Joe Turner once played in Russell City.

Decades after Russell City was eradicated, its namesake music festival continues to this day. The Hayward/Russell City Blues Festival will be held this year on July 7-8, from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. at

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Kenneth McCoy sells *Street Spirit* outside a Berkeley post office. Lydia Gans photo

Sharing Food Is An Act of Resistance

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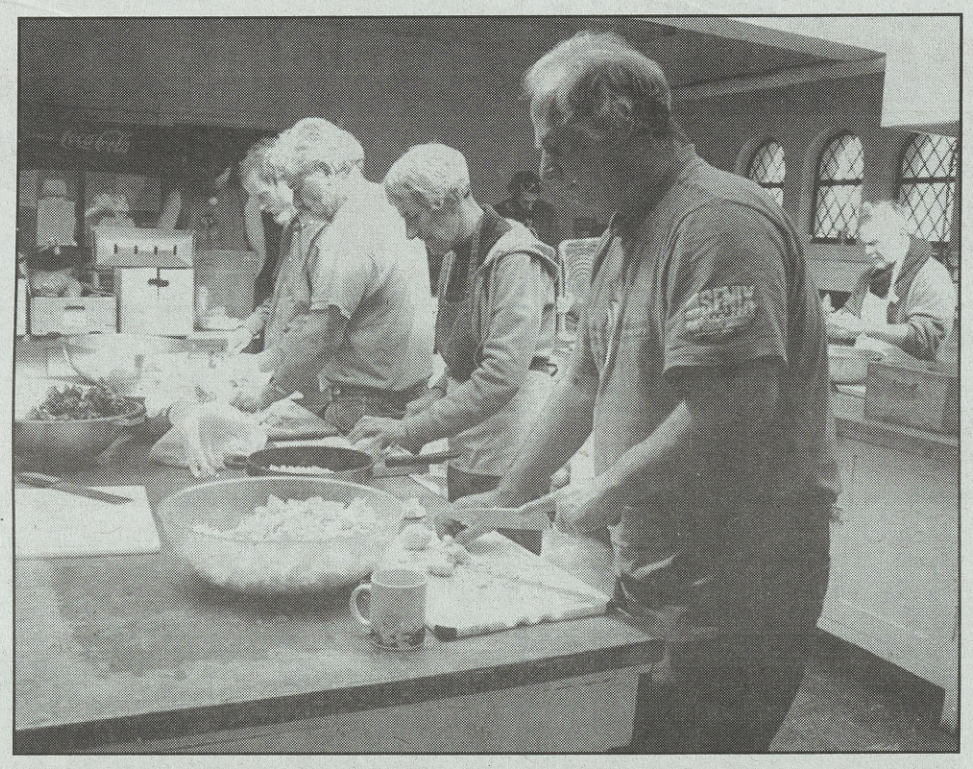
ments, but an occasion to relax from the stress of the outside world. By sharing meals every day, Food Not Bombs is following the same tradition.

If violence erupts, and sometimes it does because poor, hungry and homeless people often are stressed, it is quickly abated. With a plate of food in your hand, it's easier to find a place on the lawn, the stage or a picnic table, and sit down with friends and chill out. And since the meal is a collective effort, everyone who cares to take part is welcome to help with the serving or come to the kitchens on any day to take part in the meal preparation.

In preparing the daily meals, as in all our activities, we put into practice another of our basic principles: all decisions are made by consensus. All Food Not Bombs groups are run entirely by volunteers who have equal voice in decision-making.

Whether it's deciding what to cook. or what actions to support, or what events to participate in, decisions are not simply made by majority vote. Everyone has to be in accord — or at least not oppose a given course of action. The same principle holds in our kitchens. There is no boss, so everyone feels equally responsible. Accordingly, people take pride in producing a good meal.



Members of East Bay Food Not Bombs prepare nutritious meals for hundreds of people each day, utilizing the kitchens of volunteers. Lydia Gans photo

The third basic principle of Food Not Bombs is vegetarianism. Our food reflects our dedication to nonviolence — including violence against animals. Whenever possible, the food we serve is vegan. This also avoids problems with food spoilage which is generally not a problem with plant-based foods. (When we get donations of meat products, we turn them over to soup kitchens that aren't vegetarian. We believe that eating is more important than being politically pure.)

Food Not Bombs goes back more than 30 years. The first group was organized in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1980 by anti-nuclear activists protesting the construction of a nuclear power plant. In 1988, a San Francisco chapter was started and East Bay Food Not Bombs was founded not long after. Today, there are hundreds of Food Not Bombs chapters all over the United States and a thousand around the world — in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Europe and Australia.

Food Not Bombs exists in small villages and big cities. All adhere to the same principles of working together to share free food. Besides the regular servings and the meals provided at protest actions, Food Not Bombs groups are often the first to provide food for disaster survivors, They were there for the 1989 Bay Area earthquake, and they were there for Hurricane Katrina, for 9/11 rescue workers and many other occasions.

Scanning the Internet turns up an impressive list of Food Not Bombs websites. This is a movement that is growing. It provides nourishment to some of the poorest members of our society, while nurturing the bodies and spirits of activists in the struggle for social change.

A Man of Spirit: The Long Journey of Kenneth McCoy

from page 1

Hayward City Hall Plaza, 777 B Street.

Although Russell City was so close to Oakland, Kenneth McCoy's childhood resembled growing up in a small country village. His boyhood memories of the little town almost have the flavor of a rural homestead. "We had a farm," he recalls, "with chickens, pigs, a cow and a horse."

But it was by no means an idyllic life. There was no urban infrastructure, no indoor plumbing.

"We had outhouses, we had cesspools," Kenneth says. "The outhouse sat on wooden planks. There's a deep trench they did for the waste. When it rains, it goes through boards — fills up."

He recalls the tragic drowning death of his three-year-old nephew who was playing outside a neighbor's house. "The top of the outhouse had been knocked down so there was just the trench full of water and waste. He was playing out front, then went around back chasing the ball and fell into the trench. They pulled the body out and put the body in the kitchen."

Kenneth was only 12. It's a memory that has stayed with him his whole life. "It was a very trying time," he says.

Several years after that, Kenneth's family was forced to leave. He remembers the expulsion. "My father finally tore down the shack we lived in and built a home, a nice home. After he built it, that's when the city came along and told him he had to sell it or they would take it."

In 1963, Alameda County officials decided to demolish the entire community and redevelop it as an industrial park. The officials created the Russell City Redevelopment Agency to forcibly purchase all the properties, or seize them by eminent domain. In only two years, hundreds of families and individual residents were forced to relocate and leave their homes behind.

His family moved to Oakland, where Kenneth enrolled at Oakland High. He lived most of his life in Northern California working in construction or building maintenance. Listening to him talk, it's clear he worked hard and sometimes dangerous jobs. He described a couple of serious accidents, the last one landing him in the hospital when he was found to have cancer.

The need for money to pay for his medicine led him to sell the *Street Spirit,* but for Kenneth it has become a lot more than a job. He speaks with pride about the paper, about how people tell him how much they like the *Street Spirit*.

"Every time they buy a paper," Kenneth says, "they say this is the best paper — better than the *Chronicle* and the *Tribune*. They are not true words in them, but everything in the *Street Spirit* paper is true. And they always tell me that."

Kenneth talks about the man who bought a paper from him recently and then, when he found the front-page article on "The Mississippi Delta: Birthplace of the Blues," he came back ten minutes later and bought 19 more copies.

Since receiving his cancer diagnosis, he has been able to stay in shelters, but before that he was homeless for some time. He is anxious to describe that experience.

"I'd sleep on the sidewalks in between entrance ways of bookstores, down near the BART station on Shattuck," Kenneth tells me. "Sleeping on the street —-I never got a good night's sleep because you would wonder when a person walks past. You'd hear the footsteps.

"As the footsteps disappear in the dark, you try to go back to sleep. By the time you're halfway asleep, you hear more footsteps. That would keep you (awake) till you couldn't hear those any more."

He recalled the time several years ago when news got around of someone threatening to spray lighter fluid on sleeping homeless people and set them on fire. The homeless people in Berkeley got together and "we all decided to take our shopping carts and make a great big circle and sleep in between that circle with the carts around us." That encampment took place in Martin Luther King Park in downtown Berkeley, and lasted for several weeks.

Kenneth is a regular voter and readily expresses his political views. "I vote every year. I vote Democrat — even if they don't win, I always voted Democrat. Some people say Republicans give us more. I don't think so. I think they tend to bury us, tend to bury us and step on us.

"We're the little ones (and) they look over us. When I'm sitting here at night and one passes by, you can tell if they're Republican 'cause they're looking straight ahead, or looking down. Democrats, they always pass by and face me, at least give me a conversation. But a Republican keeps walking."

He celebrated his 64th birthday on May 10, 2012. He has a roof over his head now and the income from his *Street Spirit* sales, so he can buy the medicine to control the cancer. We look forward to seeing Kenneth at the North Berkeley post office with his papers for a long time to come.

'He Is Who I Have to Thank on Father's Day'

Editor's note: J.C. Orton, director of Street Spirit's vendor program, received this letter from a vendor on Father's Day. It is a testimony to the caring spirit behind Orton's work with the vendors.

The first time I saw him was in front of the Men's Shelter on Center Street — a short, big man with white hair, a black cowboy hat and a gentle smile. I was there for a free laundry, and he was there to help homeless people.

When he found out I was new in the United States, and I didn't have a work permit, he offered to help me to become a newspaper seller. Soon, he made me a badge to start my job, and showed me a place and time to get a free meal.

He told me about the places where I can find him to get newspapers, or any other help, and gave me his phone number for any questions that I might have.

That was a great help.

Doing this job changed my life. I could practice my English, earn money, get whatever I might need and have my free time. After a while, I found out that he knows many homeless people by name, with some necessary details.

Time and time again, patiently, he corrected my English and asked me if I needed anything. Now I know, a big part of my safety and happiness in Berkeley is because of him. He is who I have to thank on Fathers Day!

Thank you, J.C. May God bless you, and give you a long and healthy life.

— *Sanam*

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Street Spirit is published by the **American Friends Service Committee (AFSC).** Homeless vendors receive 50 papers a day for free, earn income and educate the community about social justice issues. Please **donate** or **subscribe** to *Street Spirit* !

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Contact *Street Spirit* Vendor Coordinator

The *Street Spirit* vendor program is managed by J.C. Orton. More than 150 homeless vendors sell *Street Spirit* in Berkeley and Oakland. Please buy *Street Spirit* only from badged vendors.

If you have questions about the vendor program, call J.C. Orton on his cell phone at (510) 684-1892.

Berkeley's Segregation Measure Fails the Test of History

Editorial by Terry Messman

After years of civil rights marches, freedom rides, and bus boycotts, the U.S. Congress voted overwhelmingly in favor of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This landmark legislation outlawed many forms of racial discrimination against African Americans, including segregation in schools, workplaces and public accommodations.

This legislation was a major turning point in U.S. history. But how well have we learned the lessons of history? One lesson that seems forgotten is that if the civil rights of Black citizens had been put up to a vote by the citizens of Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia and other states, they would have lost overwhelmingly at the ballot box.

In the midst of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, Alabama voters elected Gov. George Wallace and Georgia voters elected Gov. Lester Maddox precisely because Wallace and Maddox were staunchly in favor of segregation "now and forever." Both men did everything in their power to obstruct the granting of equal rights to Black citizens and both were overwhelmingly supported by the electorate for their vile acts of racial discrimination.

But Congress and the Supreme Court didn't allow the majority of voters of those states to use the ballot box to deny fellow citizens their civil rights. Instead, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act despite the opposition of Southern governors and voters, because certain constitutional rights are too fundamentally important, too sacred, to be denied to minorities — even by a majority vote of the electorate.

This is precisely the lesson that Berkeley Mayor Tom Bates and a majority of the City Council have failed to understand and honor. In voting to place Bates' grossly discriminatory initiative to ban sitting in Berkeley on the November ballot, the City Council has betrayed the very concept of equal rights for all.

Homeless people don't have anywhere but public spaces to sit and rest. If the act of sitting down is criminalized, the obvious intent of the law is to drive visibly poor citizens out of downtown areas.

Punitive laws that banish certain groups of people from public spaces — whether based on appearance, economic class, gender, religion or race — are, in fact, modern-day segregation decrees, plain and simple. Berkeley's proposed sitting ban is based on the same kind of societal prejudice against "undesirables" that gave birth to the discriminatory Jim Crow laws in the worst moments of our history.

"I have the right to exist in public space." **Young people in Berkeley are protesting Mayor Bates' attempts to banish them from the streets.** Janny Castillo photo

On June 12, the City Council shamed Berkeley's own best traditions of tolerance and respect for equal rights by voting 6-3 to place the anti-sitting measure on November's ballot. Councilmembers Max Anderson, Kriss Worthington and Jesse Arreguin once again distinguished themselves by voting against the council's latest attempt to pass a segregation decree that would destroy civil rights protections for poor and homeless people.

Max Anderson's statements to Mayor Bates at the council meeting were deeply insightful, verging on prophetic. Anderson said that sitting and lying are such basic and essential human rights that they should never be allowed to be abolished, even by a majority of voters.

Anderson warned that, in the past, people have voted to eliminate the basic rights of their fellow citizens. He then made the most telling comment of all — the one sentence that should have made Bates and his council majority repent of their ill-considered plan to put human rights up for sale to the highest bidder.

Anderson said: "Voters in the South would have voted in the 1950s to extend slavery." Anderson is completely correct in saying that. It is shameful that any elected official in Berkeley could vote for such a repressive measure after hearing Anderson's analysis.

Last May and June, many homeless activists and organizations in Berkeley mobilized successfully to convince the City Council not to vote for Mayor Bates' first attempt to have the council pass an anti-sitting measure. Virtually every homeless organization in Berkeley joined the Keep Sitting Legal Coalition, and after months of organizing protests and sit-ins, the council and the business lobbyists backed away from Bates' proposal.

This latest ploy by Bates is an attempt to avoid the political price of having the council itself vote for this anti-democratic measure. By putting the anti-sitting measure on the November ballot, Bates and his allies take the measure out of their own hands and duck the firestorm of controversy the proposal provoked last spring.

In their shrewd calculations, they know the business community can raise hundreds of times more money than homeless people and their economically stressed allies. Also, they are counting on the fact that it is far easier for people in the privacy of the voting booth to vote on their prejudices, rather than on their principles and democratic values.

But human rights should never be abolished by a majority vote, and they shouldn't be up for sale. The rights of the poorest of the poor shouldn't be eliminated just because the business class can raise infinitely more money than the poor and their few allies. It is all so cynical it makes one sick at heart.

Once again, Bates has shown that human rights are for sale by doing the bidding of Telegraph Avenue business owners, the Chamber of Commerce and the Downtown Berkeley Association.

In Berkeley, as elsewhere in the nation, business interests not only control the economy; they also control the political system, because most politicians are for sale. This triumph of profit over human rights has led city after city to cave in to business interests and vote to enact segregation ordinances that should never have been countenanced by the elected officials of an alleged democracy.

The vote by the Berkeley City Council to put the anti-sitting measure on the November ballot shows us that nearly everything can be bought and sold — the rights of the poor, the city sidewalks, and the political process itself, along with our elected officials.

In his thorough coverage of the council meeting in the online *Berkeley Daily Planet,* reporter Ted Friedman described the following revealing exchange between this repressive measure's chief architects.

"As Roland Peterson and Craig Becker of Telegraph property owners group left the meeting, they observed, 'Same votes we've had all along.'"

One thing about businessmen — they know how to tally up their assets and calculate the value of their acquisitions. They walked out of the meeting with the majority of the council in their pocket. Now, they're laying plans to buy the election results that will serve the interests of the business class and criminalize the impoverished class forced to live on sidewalks.

Perhaps, as they stroll to the bank, these business leaders have been forced to step one too many times over the sprawled bodies of the destitute victims of our nation's distressed economic climate. So now they will attempt to pass laws to banish poor people from public view.

If they are successful in using the electoral process to destroy the human rights of their poorest neighbors, let them consider how the prophet Isaiah once described exactly this kind of legislation:

"Woe to the legislators of infamous laws, to those who issue tyrannical decrees, who refuse justice to the unfortunate, and cheat the poor among my people of their rights, who make widows their prey and rob the orphan." (*Isaiah* 10:1-2)

Challenging Berkeley's Anti-Sitting Measure

by T.J. Johnston

The measure to ban sitting or lying on sidewalks in Berkeley's commercial areas isn't the first attempt to regulate such activity in the city. Nor is it the first law on any municipal books imposing penalties for reclining outside a public place.

The initiative, which the Berkeley City Council placed on November's ballot, would prohibit sitting or lying in front of businesses from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m.

It also comes on the heels of an evaluation of San Francisco's year-old ban on sitting and lying on sidewalks. City Hall Fellows, a nonpartisan public service corps, reported that enforcement has not deterred the homeless people from resting outside.

Similarly, the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness concluded that enforcing quality of life laws is largely ineffective in changing homeless people's public behaviors.

Elisa Della-Piana, director of the Neighborhood Justice Clinic in Berkeley, also decries the measure as punitive.

"It will achieve nothing except create division in the community," she said. "Enforcement of the ordinance would keep people homeless and create criminal records that could prevent them from getting housing or jobs."

Other cities also attempted to pass their own sit-lie laws. If Berkeley passes its initiative, it would join other West Coast cities that attempted to place restrictions on when and where people are legally allowed to hang out.

Berkeley officials passed a similar ordinance in 1994, but the Berkeley Community Health Project succeeded in challenging it. The court found the law violates constitutional rights to free assembly, due process and equal protection. Four years later, the City Council enacted a law that forbids lying down on commercial areas. That law remains in effect.

Seattle's ordinance is the model for existing sit-lie legislation. Palo Alto and San Francisco passed their own Seattle-style laws, apparently emboldened by the city's successful defense in a 1997 challenge. A Washington state appeals court upheld the law. In 2010, Palo Alto's expansion of an area-specific ban to the whole city also withstood a county-level ruling.

In June of the same year, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors defeated a similarly intended proposal. The following November, a ballot proposition sponsored by then-Mayor Gavin Newsom passed with 54 percent of the vote.

The existing law in Santa Cruz is unusually prohibitive. It encompasses sidewalks and bus stops. It also establishes no-sit zones. A 14-foot distance must be kept from buildings in city limits, as well as a 50-foot-wide berth from ATMs.

Other laws struck down or modified included one in Los Angeles that required enforcement be stopped if no shelter beds were available and another in Portland that was found to preempt state law.

Street Spirit

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Street Spirit welcomes submissions of articles, poems, photos and art.

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Santa Monica Students Pepper-Sprayed for Protesting Fee Hikes

"It really creates segregation between the haves and the have-nots. If you can pay, you'll get your classes. That's guaranteed if you have money. But if you don't have money, you may get classes, and you may not. Community colleges were not created for this."

— Margaret Quiñones-Perez, Santa Monica College Board of Trustees

by David Bacon

Today, California community colleges charge $36 per unit, a fee due to increase to $46 this summer. Those fees have been the subject of strong criticism by students and the California Federation of Teachers since they began rising as a result of the state's fiscal crisis.

Union leaders and students have shown that as the fees increase, the number of students able to afford community college decreases. Under the impact of the economic crisis, Santa Monica College (SMC) has cut back more than 1000 classes in recent years. Its current funding from the state was reduced by $11 million this year, and it may lose an additional $5 million next year.

On April 3, as the Board of Trustees was debating a proposal from SMC President Chui Tsang to institute a system charging much higher fees for some of the classes offered by the community college, 30 students and a four-year-old girl were pepper-sprayed outside the meeting room.

While it wasn't what she expected when she was elected to the Board of Trustees of Santa Monica College, it wasn't a surprise to Margaret Quiñones-Perez. She called it "a wake-up call to us as an institution that we needed to have a bigger conversation ... We had to stop and look and see what was going on."

Last year, SMC President Tsang proposed that the 34,000-student college create a nonprofit foundation that would offer core classes, such as English and math, but charge as much as $200 per unit. He predicted that despite state reductions, the college could actually increase offerings if it began charging a much higher fee for additional sections of the most popular classes, once the first set of classes offered at lower fees was filled. Some district officials even predicted that the coming winter session might offer only the higher fee classes.

Tsang and other supporters of the idea first tried to convince legislators to carry a bill, AB 515, which would allow these fee increases. Such legislation would be needed, most believe, because current state regulations prohibit a two-tier fee scheme.

Paul Feist, a spokesman for California Community Colleges Chancellor Jack Scott, has held that higher fees can only be charged for contract courses geared to the needs of specific employers. In general, he says, state law prohibits higher fees for normal, core classes.

The bill failed in committee, however. Then SMC President Tsang came to present his proposed fee increases at a Santa Monica Board of Trustees retreat.

"I said that I didn't think it was proper to introduce this proposal in a meeting that wasn't public," Quiñones-Perez recalls. "He slipped it in anyway. I felt this was very disrespectful, and a real problem because he was trying to get board members' agreement in a meeting that was not a public venue. The public anger and frustration when it finally came out was predictable."

That happened on April 3, when a hundred students marched from the campus library to a board meeting, chanting "No cuts, no fees, education should be free!"

When they arrived, they found the meeting was taking place in a room that couldn't accommodate a large crowd, and that people were being given numbers to gain admittance. As students massed at the doorway, the chanting changed to, "Let us in, let us in!" Campus security then pepper-sprayed the crowd and manhandled some of the students. About 30 students suffered the chemical's effects, and two were taken to the hospital.

Afterwards Tsang blamed the students. "Although a number of participants at the meeting engaged in unlawful conduct, Santa Monica College police personnel exercised restraint," he asserted later in a statement. "Santa Monica College regrets that a group of people chose to disrupt a public meeting in an unlawful manner."

"It's a strange time we are living in when people who are outraged by social injustice and the lack of democracy in our schools and society are seen as the crazy ones," responded Harrison Wills, student body president in an internet comment. He wondered "how incredibly important decisions are made without our consultation and to top it off in an extremely small room for a school of 35,000 students."

The real problem, explains Quinones-Perez, who with student trustee Joshua Scuteri were the only votes against the proposal, is that it creates a two-tier educational system in community colleges. Fees that are affordable and equal for all were the most important guarantors of the promise in California's Master Plan that higher education would be available to every student who wanted it.

"It really creates segregation instead," she says, "between the haves and the have-nots. If you can pay, you'll get your classes. That's guaranteed if you have money. But if you don't have money, you may get classes, and you may not. Community colleges were not created for this."

Skyrocketing fees in the state university and University of California systems have already frayed the Master Plan badly. UC Berkeley has turned away thousands of in-state applicants, who have been replaced by affluent students paying out-of-state fees that make UCB more expensive than Yale and Princeton. About 30 percent of the incoming freshman class of 2011 now pay out-of-state fees that are $23,000 a year more than in-state students.

Some Santa Monica College board members call Tsang's proposal innovative. "They say the Master Plan is outdated, not in tune with financial reality and what's feasible," Quiñones-Perez says. "But you don't get to change the values of what community colleges are supposed to do. Only the people of California get to do that."

In response to SMC President Tsang's assertion that the change is necessary, and that students will either have to pay even more to private college operators or go without classes entirely, she responds that "we have to be able to weather the current fiscal storm, work with legislators, even scale back some."

"Corporations Are Not People: WE ARE THE PEOPLE!" Art by Tatiana Makovkin

She adds, "But I've been on this board for eight years, and the Santa Monica School Board for 12 years before that, and we've had peaks and valleys in funding all that time. We will straighten this out as a state, and we may have to wait, and we may have to see some pain, but it will be an equalized pain and an equalized solution."

For Quiñones-Perez, defending the Master Plan is second nature. Its guarantees enabled her to get an education that would otherwise have been far out of reach. She grew up in Stoner Park, a poor enclave in the middle-class neighborhoods of west Los Angeles.

"My dad came to the U.S. when there were tobacco and onion fields in the area," she says. "You could still see the shacks farm workers lived in on Olympic Boulevard and Sawtelle when I was growing up. That's where he met my mom, who was born here. They met in The Lucky U bar — the local hangout where Latinos of their generation went to socialize."

She was the middle child of nine brothers and sisters, seven of whom survived to adulthood. Then her father returned to Mexico, where he was killed in a horrific car accident. That left her mom to support the family.

"She found us a cheap house in a safe neighborhood, away from the gangs of Venice, where my older brother was killed," Quiñones-Perez remembers. "She worked as a domestic, and by the time I was eight, I was going to work with her. At first I thought it was exciting. I was in big houses, with pretty things I'd never seen before. But soon I felt humiliated, washing the bathroom on my knees. I was embarrassed and ashamed. I didn't understand why I had to clean other peoples' bathrooms. When I saw the drapes and carpets in those homes, I knew I was poor."

In addition, she began to realize what it meant to be Mexican in Los Angeles. Like many of her generation, her mother had been punished in school for speaking Spanish. Although young Margaret spoke Spanish at home, her mother pushed her to speak English out in the world.

"In the quietness of my mind," she recalls, "I knew that if I'd had blonde hair and blue eyes life would have been better for us. It's not that I didn't want to be Mexican, but I knew that if you weren't, you'd have better food and a better life. So there we were, cleaning houses and getting food stamps. In back of Safeway I'd meet Sam, a clerk who'd give us crates of loose grapes and bruised fruit — what they were throwing away. For us, that was a treat, like Christmas. My mom would go to the bakery outlets for the day-old bread and cupcakes. We learned to appreciate the little things."

In school, Quiñones-Perez faced another barrier. She had auditory problems, and in first grade her mother signed the papers sending her on the bus to special education classes. "In those days they didn't have separate classes for the blind, or the emotionally disturbed or physically disabled. We were all lumped together. And for the next 12 years, that's how I went to school."

Nevertheless, she graduated from high school, the first in her family and only one of her siblings who did. "It was a hard childhood, but it made me a principled person. I know right from wrong, I'm very loyal, and I know how to work hard. But I was taught to hide my disability, and that I was stupid." That lasted even when she enrolled in Santa Monica College, where she got all C's.

But at Santa Monica, she discovered the student organization MEChA — the Movimiento Estudantil Chicano de Aztlan.

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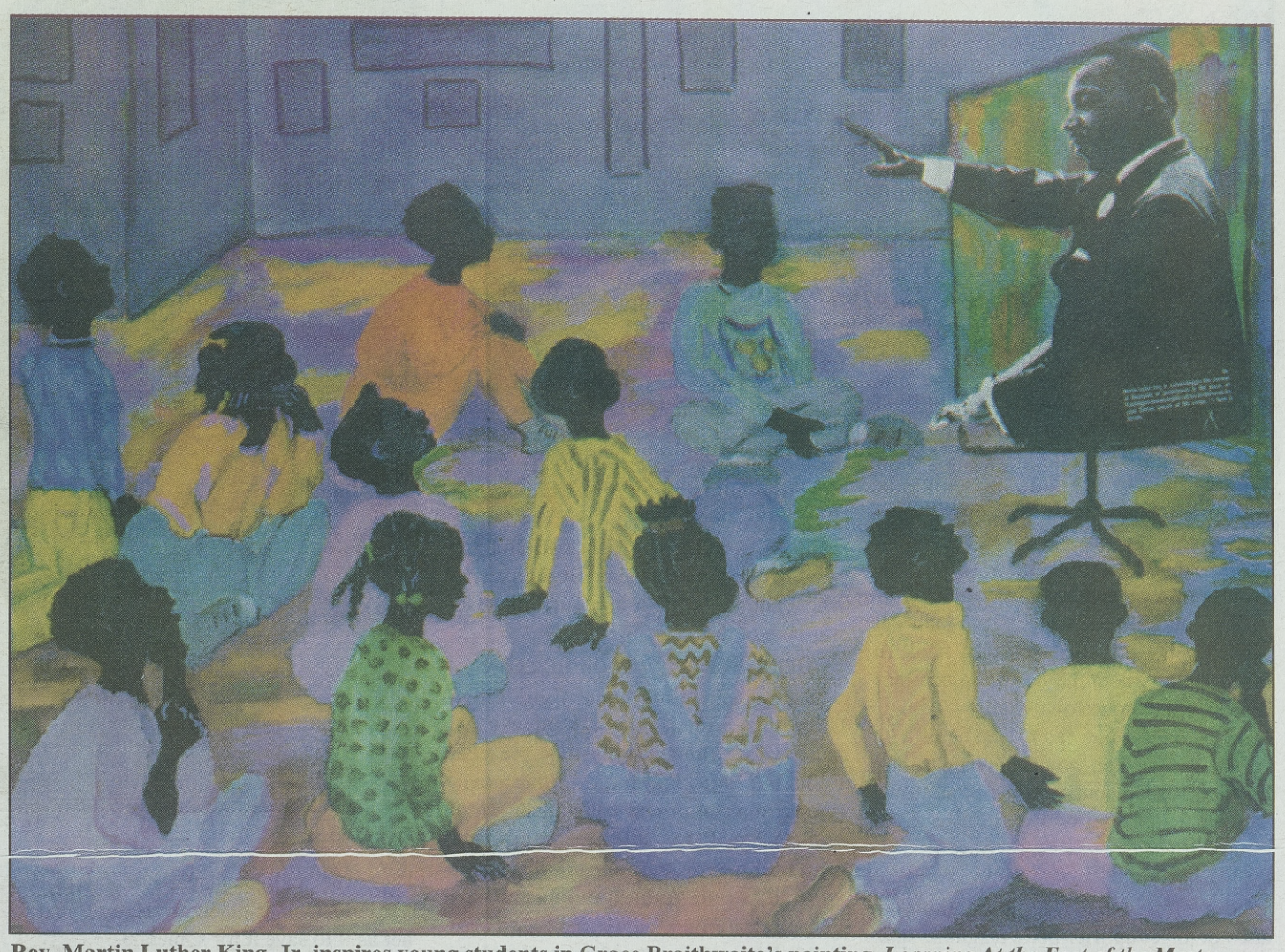
One Million Students Are Homeless in America

"A good education can put children and youth who are homeless on the path to a brighter future."

— Ellen L. Bassuk, MD, National Center on Family Homelessness

"The Future Will Be Ours. Occupy Wall Street." **Poster art by Michelle Rogers.**



Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. inspires young students in Grace Braithwaite's painting, *Learning At the Feet of the Master.*

by Andy Beres, National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty

WASHINGTON, D.C. — For the first time in history, public schools reported more than one million homeless children and youth, according to data released on June 26, 2012, by the U.S. Department of Education. The 1,065,794 homeless students enrolled by U.S. preschools and K-12 schools in the 2010-2011 school year is the highest number on record, and a 13 percent increase over the 2009-2010 school year.

This total underestimates the number of homeless children, because it does not include homeless infants and toddlers, young children who are not enrolled in public preschool programs, and homeless children and youth who were not identified by school officials.

Forty-four states reported year-to-year increases in the number of homeless students, with 15 states reporting increases of 20 percent or more. States with the largest increases in the numbers of homeless students include Kentucky (47 percent), Michigan (38 percent), Mississippi (35 percent), Utah (47 percent), and West Virginia (38 percent).

The number of homeless children enrolled in public schools has increased 57 percent since the beginning of the recession, in the 2006-2007 school year.

In Michigan, the number of homeless children enrolled in public schools has increased 315 percent between 2008-2011. "Every single county in Michigan reported homeless children and youth in its public schools," said Pam Kies-Lowe, coordinator for homeless education at the Michigan Department of Education. Economic conditions in the state have contributed to the problem. "One school district referred to child and youth homelessness as the 'tsunami after the earthquake'."

Under federal law, school districts are required to immediately enroll homeless children and youth. The law also requires that, when it is in his or her best interest, schools ensure that homeless students can stay in the same school when forced to move. Every school district must also designate a homeless student liaison to provide assistance and referrals.

"Schools are the largest provider of services to homeless children and youth. Education is both a safety net and a ladder up and out of poverty. " said Mattie Lord, president of the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth. "School districts across the nation have responded to the increase in homelessness by creating food pantries, developing housing programs, and assigning academic advisors."

"As we reported in *America's Youngest Outcasts*, the number of homeless children and youth in America continues to increase," said Ellen L. Bassuk, MD, president of the National Center on Family Homelessness. "These high numbers reinforce the urgent need to increase targeted funding to public schools through the Education for Homeless Children and Youth program. A good education can put children and youth who are homeless on the path to a brighter future."

The data also shows the troubling depth of America's housing crisis. "The severe lack of affordable housing for families has yet to be addressed, and over one million children are paying the price," said Maria Foscarinis, executive director of the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty. "Everyone has a human right to safe, decent, affordable housing. And until we make that right a reality for all Americans, the number of homeless students will continue rising."

Not all of the children included in the data released today are recognized as "homeless" by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). As a result, homeless children are eligible for educational assistance through local schools, but not help from HUD. Congress is considering legislation — the Homeless Children and Youth Act (H.R. 32), sponsored by Congresswoman Judy Biggert (R-IL) — that makes all homeless children identified by public schools eligible for HUD homeless assistance.

"Homeless kids shouldn't be denied a safe place to sleep, a meal, and other basic needs because two government agencies can't agree on definitions," said Bruce Lesley, president of First Focus Campaign for Children. "This data gives Congress more than a million reasons to pass the Homeless Children and Youth Act."

The data released on June 26 are available on the website of the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) at http://center.serve.org/nche/. NCHE is the U.S. Department of Education's technical assistance and information provider in the area of homeless education.

The National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty (NLCHP) seeks to end and prevent homelessness through advocacy, public education, and impact litigation.

University Student Suffers Due to Unaffordable Dental Care

Editor's note: Longtime Street Spirit contributor Robert L. Terrell is a journalism professor at Cal State University East Bay. Edgar Segura, one of Professor Terrell's journalism students, wrote this important account of the hidden poverty many college students face — burdened by rising education costs, student loans, low-paying jobs and soaring medical costs.

by Edgar Segura

I made my first visit to the dentist last month, my very first. I had never been to the dentist or had a tooth cleaning until recently. But yes, my first time going to a dentist was May 2012. Of course, you can imagine I was very scared.

Growing up I didn't have the privilege of going to a dentist. My parents couldn't afford it and my parent's employers would never offer us dental coverage, nor would I ever qualify for help under a public program to receive treatment for that.

I'm 24 years old now, and in less than six days, I'll be having my graduation ceremony. I'll be graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism. For me, it's been a difficult struggle on multiple levels getting to this point.

For one, it's been very painful having to study for an exam with an aching, fractured tooth. This happened very frequently to me during my undergrad years and to several of my teeth, too. It's something I've had to hold back and keep to myself since I wasn't sure how others would react to this news.

It is unfortunate, though an undeniable fact, that my oral hygiene is in poor health because I couldn't afford dental care. My dentist is great and so are the staff there, but even she can't reverse the damage of gum disease with the latest tools and techniques modern medicine can offer.

One thing I learned from my first visit is that I have a very serious condition of gum disease, but it is treatable. At best, this means I'm going to have eight extractions. Four of those are my wisdom teeth, while the other four are far from savable.

Next month, I'm scheduled for a consultation on these extractions, at which point I'll have to come to a decision on the procedure. I'm anxious about this date and hesitant. It's a heavy decision since the procedure is a debt I'll have to carry in addition to my student loans — which I don't have a means of paying back at the moment.

My insurance doesn't cover implants and at $2,000 a tooth, I'm going to need four of these. All this leaves me feeling bitter and upset. And helpless, especially knowing that this could have easily been prevented and much less painful.

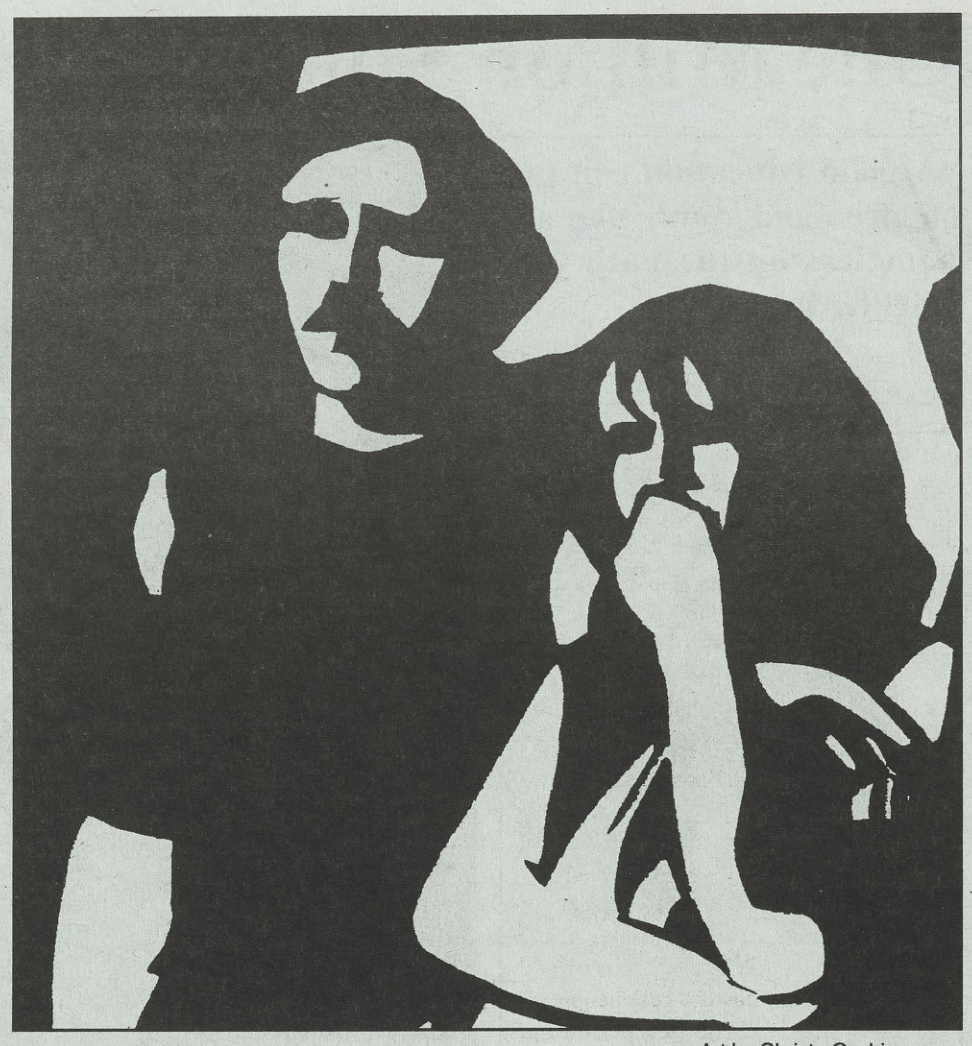
Had I received dental care at an earlier and younger age, my situation would be very different today. Over the years, I have found myself moving from one part-time job to another trying to meet my expenses. But an hourly minimum wage makes it unbearably difficult to do so, much less to build savings and plan for my future.

Quite bluntly, I'm tired of pushing this around in my own thoughts, pretending that everything is okay when it is not. As we move further into the 21st century and with the presidential elections just around the corner, I would like to see dental care take equal precedence to health care in this country. I mean come on, it's not like I'm asking for the world!

No Pity in the Cruel City

Yet Friendship Flourishes for Molly and Lloyd

He opened his desk drawer. Next to his medals, Lloyd fingered the black-and-white photo of Molly and mutely kissed it. He treasured the photo more than the medals.



Art by Christa Occhiogrosso

Short story by George Wynn

The sky is dark and threatening. Nevertheless, golf balls are whizzing by on the greens of Harding Park in San Francisco. Lloyd is walking around Lake Merced, like he does every morning. There is a glimmer of a smile on his face while he lets a cherished memory run through his mind.

It seems like yesterday, but in reality it all happened three years ago, back in 2009, the afternoon he heard the commotion up at the Stonestown Mall.

''Lady, lady, you can't sleep here!"

The bony, 40ish woman yawned, small book on her lap, and eyed the Stonestown Borders employee as disdainfully as he regarded her. "Lady, get going or I'm calling security."

She sighed heavily, but made no attempt to get up. Her body language said: "I can't take it anymore. I hate this life."

In the chair across from her, Lloyd could have just continued reading Paul Bowles' story "The Delicate Prey" and not stepped in, but of course he did. He stood up and approached her and nonchalantly said, "Ma'am would you care to have lunch at America's finest dining establishment, McDonalds?"

She shook her head with a bemused look. "Sir, you have got yourself a lunch partner. And I do thank you."

He hooked his arm in hers and they walked out, to the astonished looks of the Borders employees and gawking patrons.

HER LEADING MAN

The wind off Lake Merced gusted behind the Borders bookstore cafe, only a few steps away from McDonald's. The wind died down quickly. Lloyd unhooked his arm from hers before they entered.

"How's my acting?" said Lloyd.

"Honey, you can be my leading man any day."

Lloyd smiled at that.

"My name's Molly," she said, sticking out her hand firmly.

"Lloyd. Pleased to meet you," he said, feeling the sweat of her hand.

Molly ordered a chicken sandwich with large fries and coffee. Lloyd settled for a veggie salad and a carton of milk.

Molly drank her coffee fast. "I like the rush of caffeine."

"I see," said Lloyd with a baffled look.

Lloyd finished off the last of his salad while Molly nibbled on a French fry.

"Thank you for lunch," she said. Lloyd nodded and reached for his milk. She gave a small grin. "You're a good man Lloyd."

He shrugged off the compliment and took a sip of milk. "No, just a silly, retired, meddling man."

"What kind of work did you do, Lloyd?"

"I taught deaf youngsters for 30 years."

"Did you like it?"

"Yes I did, very much."

"What did you like about it?"

Lloyd raised his eyes as if he was reflecting, but didn't say anything.

Molly repeated her question. "Lloyd..."

"I'm getting there," Lloyd said, gesturing with his hand as if to say, hold on a minute.

"You all right Lloyd?"

He nodded and let out a few breaths, light as feathers. "Well, after I returned from overseas, I tried to block out all the terrible sounds of war, so I felt very comfortable with people who couldn't hear. In a certain way, I even envied them.

"How about you?" Lloyd asked. "What's your story?"

Molly eyed Lloyd's tight fists and how he slowly unwound them. He was a man who understood pain and suffering, she was sure of that.

DISOWNED, ALONE, ON HER OWN

She replied, "I'm a country girl, Lloyd. Grew up in a small town in Kentucky. My father was a fire-and-brimstone preacher. I couldn't date or even go to the movies (the devil's pictures, he called them). I left home when I was seventeen and never been back. He disowned me anyway.

"I started out waitressing, then worked in factories up and down the East Coast. Fell in love with a dope addict in New York City who turned me on to the hard stuff and I got hooked. Stole money and jewelry, did a little stint in jail and wound up on mean streets U.S.A. and shelter heaven."

"You got a place to stay now, Molly?"

"Yeah. I got a shelter bed."

"That's good," said Lloyd.

"Nothing's good," said Molly. "I'm HIV, Lloyd."

"That doesn't exclude you from the human race," said Lloyd firmly.

"I'm clean now, Lloyd."

"That's a start."

"Start to what? I ain't got no future, my life's over."

Lloyd didn't say anything, just stared into her eyes. "What do you see in my eyes?" asked Molly.

"I see the drooping eyelids of sleepless despair. That's all." Lloyd closed his eyes then opened them. "I see a woman who society forgot."

She put her head on the table, then looked up with wet eyes. "Anything else?"

"I see a woman struggling to comfort her fear."

"You see a lot, Lloyd."

"No. I just lived a long time, maybe too long."

He stood up and patted her on the shoulder. "Will I see you at Borders tomorrow at two o'clock?"

Molly looked up. "Yeah," she said in a slow voice. "I'd like that."

"Okay then, see you."

Lloyd took a step to leave and Molly shouted out, "Lloyd!" He turned around. "You are the strangest man," she said.

"I know," he said and walked out the door to his small apartment near the mall.

He took off his shirt and looked in the mirror. Body still as hard and solid as a 45-year-old man even though he was 65. Doing 75 push-ups in the morning and 100 sit-ups at night helped. He'd always stayed in shape since he'd seen the fitness guru, Jack LaLanne, on TV when he was a kid. Lloyd smiled to himself. He still had all his hair, although the blond, thick shock had now turned snow white.

Next day, at two o'clock, Molly was sitting again in the same chair in Borders. She regularly liked to escape the hubbub of downtown tension and take the M Streetcar out to Stonestown Mall.

Seeing her there, Lloyd smiled at her as if she were an old friend. She smiled back with a slight laugh. She had placed her red shoulder purse on the seat next to her as if to save it for someone.

Lloyd handed her the purse and sat down. "I like your outfit," he said. Molly was wearing red Converse high-tops, faded pink jeans and a Mickey Mouse T-shirt. "Makes you look younger."

"I'm 46, Lloyd."

"That's a good age."

"You really think I look alright?"

"You look good," said Lloyd, like he really meant it. Molly had a pretty face and exceptionally high cheekbones that radiated femininity.

SUNSHINE DAYS IN THE PARK

It was summer, and it was fairly warm and sunny. Wherever there was a green blade of grass, Molly seemed more relaxed. Day in and day out, they spent time together talking and walking and driving out to the botanical gardens in Lloyd's used Toyota Corolla. They'd wander around the arboretum and Golden Gate Park and Molly would pick flowers for herself and Lloyd, whether it was legal or not. Lloyd would merely look the other way and smile at this mild indiscretion.

One Sunday, Molly seemed less talkative than usual when she looked into Lloyd's eyes and said, "I feel very ashamed of myself and the life I led."

"You shouldn't," said Lloyd.

"I was very much in need of a friend, and then you came along," said Molly and handed Lloyd some flowers. "It's soothing to know that somebody really cares if I live or die."

Lloyd looked at her knowingly for many minutes, rubbed his eyebrows and said, "Time for ice cream," and they walked to the mall for a treat.

"You make me feel like a kid," she said, licking her strawberry cone with gusto.

"Thinking young, that's always good," smiled Lloyd.

Then they stepped into a record store and Lloyd browsed at a Hank Williams CD. "I was raised on that music," said Molly. "What do you like about him?"

"He told the truth."

"Yes, he did," said Molly.

Lloyd purchased the CD and a player on sale and batteries, and listened to it on the street for 15 minutes. Then he put the player and CD in the bag and handed it to Molly. "Enjoy your roots."

"Ah Lloyd, thanks, but how come you never want nothing in return?"

"I'm just an old-fashioned sucker."

"No, you're not, you're a northern gentleman. "You remind me of my grandpa."

"That old huh," chuckled Lloyd.

"That kind," smiled Molly.

"My joy is in sharing," said Lloyd.

Molly pulled her wallet from her shoulder purse and slipped a black-and-white photo of herself into Lloyd's hand. "I want you to have this," she said, looking at him with tender respect.

Lloyd nodded. "Thank you very much."

Suddenly for two weeks Molly disappeared. Each day Lloyd would go to Borders, but no Molly. Then one afternoon she appeared, sitting in her usual chair, looking weary and frail. When Lloyd saw the lesions on her face and arms, he knew.

MOLLY'S HARD NEWS

"Sit down Lloyd, I could use some comforting."

"It's good to see you again," said Lloyd, patting her shoulder. "What have you been doing?"

"Watching my life float down the gutter." She coughed. "I got the harsh news that I got AIDS."

Their looks connected but Lloyd remained silent. She shook her head. "I been thinking about you, Lloyd. I'm

See **Molly and Lloyd** *page 7*

In Praise of Older Hungry Women

by George Wynn

In the San Francisco of the 1950s
older ladies wore gloves
shopping at the Emporium

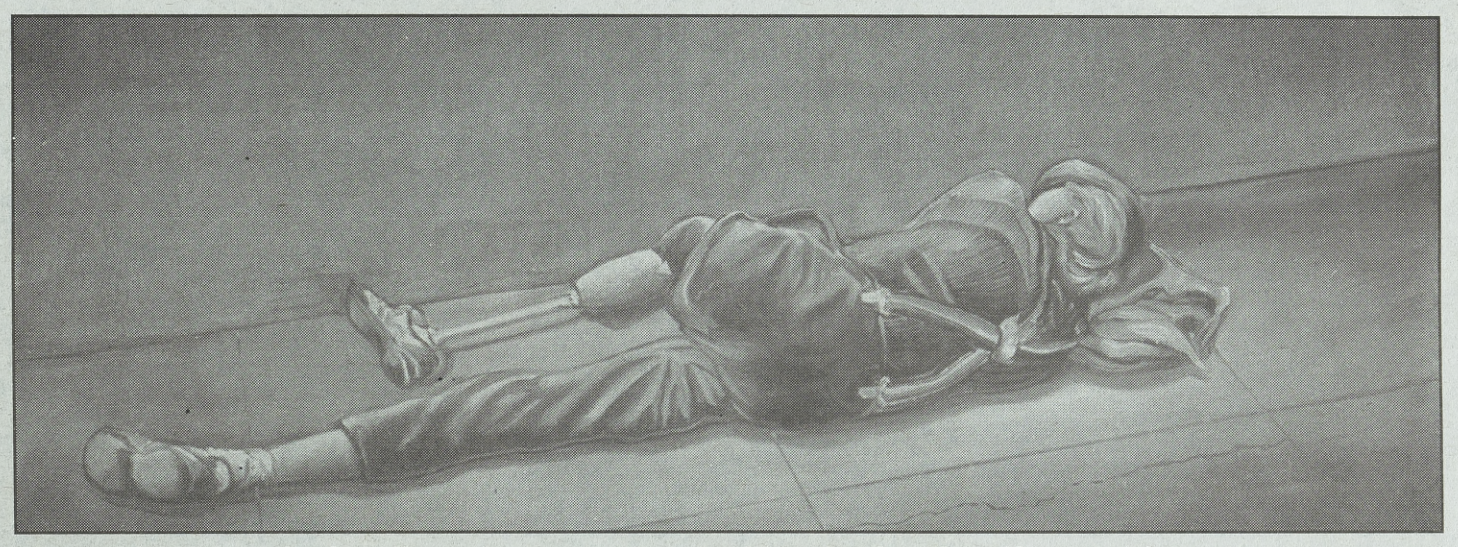
Now we see on Market Street
older ladies with outstretched palms
and worn-out clothes with cardboard
"give what you can" calling cards
in front of them reminding us of
Dorothea Lange's ruined women
of the Great Depression

If you and I enter a trance
to escape the image of
their present circumstance
and go back in time we might see
young dreamy faces even after
a hard day's work on the factory line
or young hearts sore but full of fight
after a long day of blows on
a post-war picket line

Who knows, we just might get a
true picture of their elegance

The Rich Are Shielded from the Suffering of the Poor

by Jack Bragen



Poor and disabled people who suffer on the streets undergo hardships that the rich avoid. *(rainbow)* Art by Jonathan Burstein

A popular interpretation of Buddhist thought is that the conditions of life are the same for everyone since every person on the planet is subject to birth, suffering and death, and that, furthermore, it makes no real difference what one's specific life circumstances are; suffering is created by ignorance. I don't know if this is a completely accurate interpretation of what Buddhism says, or a distortion fostered by "new age" thinking.

However, whether or not the above is the message of Buddha, I somewhat disagree with the "new age" belief of some people that "it's all in your mind." Wealthy people with their lives of comfort, safety and indulgence are subject to far less suffering in their lives compared to poor people, sick people, and victims of violence.

When someone is financially well off, it is a cushion against the physical suffering that must be endured by poor people. Even when sick, a rich person is resting on clean sheets, in a heated and air-conditioned house, and has the best people caring for him or her. The rich person must face the end of life, too. However, the circumstances under which a rich person leaves this life are likely much easier than for a poor person.

People who are born into wealth might be more subject to the kind of suffering that is created by egotism and arrogance. When safety and physical comfort are a given, the human mind seeks petty reasons to create suffering. But, if someone is wounded, sick, starving, or physically threatened, it might be too tall an order not to suffer, even for those who have practiced meditation for decades.

It is obvious that physical suffering is much harder to deal with, compared to being physically well and having unhappy emotions. Unhappiness because of not getting the things one wants in life compared to severe physical suffering is like a flea bite in comparison to an amputation. And yet, your bank balance and your credit rating shouldn't determine whether or not you must live with danger, violence, sickness and hunger.

Incarceration is one of the worst causes of human suffering. How often are those whose income is in excess of a million dollars ever incarcerated? They can afford the best lawyers, and it is almost a guarantee that they won't be wrongfully charged with a crime. If poor, a person is subject to conviction because of physically resembling a person who really committed a crime. (That's one reason why DNA evidence can be so important. It has recently cleared the names of some who have been wrongfully accused.)

Why is it that the one percent continue to gain an ever-increasing share of the money and the 99 percent are doing so poorly? For one thing, the members of the one percent are in positions of power. This allows them to have control over who gets the money. The one percent have conspired to keep all of the wealth to themselves and to deprive anyone who isn't in their club. This behavior has caused our economy to grow stagnant.

If you own a store, you can probably get away with paying your employees as little money as possible. You can fire them before they become eligible for pensions, unemployment and other benefits. You can fire them if they ask for a raise. You can fire them just because you want to.

If you own a business, you make the rules, and you can keep most of the profits for yourself. You can use predatory pricing to put yourself in a monopolistic position, and when your competitors have gone out of business, you can raise prices so that people can barely afford your products.

The problem is not that people aren't playing by the rules of the game; they mostly are. The problem is that the one percent has learned ways to tweak the business and economic environment in such a way that they can receive massive amounts of wealth while depriving others.

Why do people continue to behave in this way, amassing piles of wealth while others go hungry? I expect that the reason people do this — which is seemingly the universal reason why people commit cruel actions — is because they can.

Santa Monica Students Pepper-Sprayed

from page 4

The other students talked to her about going on to a four-year school, and in the meetings she got her first exposure to Chicano history and art. "I learned who I really was," she says, "a Chicana, a woman of Mexican descent. It gave me a better image of myself. I wasn't hiding anymore."

When she got to Cal State Dominguez Hills, she stopped hiding her disability also. A statistics teacher, Barry Rosen, immediately recognized her problem and helped her find an educational path that played to her strengths. She got married, had children, was separated, and finally completed her BA with the help of the school's childcare and financial aid programs. With a stipend from the Minority and Research Careers program, she became a mental health researcher, which prepared her for the job she's had ever since — counselor at El Camino College. She eventually got a masters' degree at the University of Southern California, and a doctorate at UCLA.

At El Camino, she joined the union right away. "I've always been a unionista," she laughs. Today she's first vice-president of the El Camino Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 1388, and its political action chair. She mobilizes members for initiatives like the current tax reform, while working with local reps.

"We've got very ugly negotiations going on now," she says, "and the district has imposed a contract on us, so we're likely to have some job actions. But I've learned over the years that if you don't raise your voice, nothing will ever happen."

For 22 years at El Camino, she was also a single parent, making it necessary to get additional part-time counseling jobs at Cerritos and Santa Monica Colleges and in migrant education programs. "But I never left El Camino," she emphasizes. "A job there was security for my children — a paycheck and healthcare." She discovered that her children had learning disabilities, just as she'd had. That made her a fighter for them, and other students like them.

When they became students in Santa Monica, Quiñones-Perez ran for the board of education of the Santa Monica Malibu Unified School District, and served there 12 years. "No one knew my kids were at Unified," she explains. "But I knew that if I wasn't fighting for them and other students of color, the system would fail them. There's a stigma to special ed that makes kids feel vulnerable and different. I wanted them to feel they could do anything."

After they'd graduated, she ran for the college district board and won. She looks at the students from the Pico neighborhood, the poor barrio of Santa Monica, and thinks, "We can do better for them."

That's one reason why Tsang's proposal makes her angry. "They just want to create more classes and sell them at a time when we aren't looking at the impact on the students who need us the most. What's the retention rate for kids of color? What are we doing to get them through?"

Quiñones-Perez is proud of Santa Monica College. "We have a wonderful reputation and a great faculty. Some students take two or three busses from a long ways away just to come here, because they believe it will help them get to a four-year school. But I fear that if they're coming from poor communities, they'll get locked out."

That's clearly a fear she shares with the students who were pepper-sprayed as they tried to get into the meeting where the decision on their future was hanging in the balance.

Molly and Lloyd

from page 6

always thinking about you."

"I've been worried about you, Molly."

"My sores are vile, Lloyd. Do they bother you?"

"They're not vile, they're rotten luck. Listen Molly, I was in a veterans hospital with soldiers with no limbs. So why would some little lesions bother me?" He held her hands in a fatherly manner and gave her an assuring smile.

"I don't want to die, Lloyd," she said.

Flashbacks of Vietnam

He squeezed his fists, flashing back to the horrifying screams of innocent, dying, young soldiers in Vietnam, pleading for their mothers. So hard to stay calm in crisis situations, Lloyd thought to himself.

"The doctor said I might have to go to the hospital pretty soon. If things get worse, the nurse said hospice might be in the cards for me." Her voice had a grave tone. "I hate my body. I failed it." She sighed. "What would you call my predicament, Lloyd?"

"Like I said — rotten luck. Life is so unfair."

"I'm bitter Lloyd."

Lloyd braced himself. "Enough talking," he said. "Let me buy you some hot chocolate in the mall."

Molly rubbed her eyes and said, "That sounds fine Lloyd." She finished the rest of her hot chocolate and reached up to wipe the stream of tears from her face. Lloyd handed her several napkins.

"I don't feel well, Lloyd. I think the Good Lord will take me pretty soon." Becoming irritated, she said, "I don't want to go to no hospital or hospice."

Molly's tragic eyes

Lloyd looked into her tragic eyes and said, "You can stay with me a few days."

He let her sleep in his bedroom while he slept on the couch. For two days he cooked for her, and his warm hands smoothed her forehead. He tried to keep her spirits up. She was weak but not overly so.

"I want to give up Lloyd," she pouted.

Lloyd spoke slowly and firmly, "Never give up Molly."

Often she'd stare out into the distance as if she were looking beyond the world or just looked at him for a long while. At these moments, a profound silence would take possession of the apartment.

She hadn't been sleeping well, but weariness got the better of her and she fell into a deep sleep in the bedroom. Lloyd had an oppressive dream and was in turmoil.

At last the day dawned. He rose from the couch, dressed quickly, put on his shoes and went to check on Molly.

Her face was rigid. He shook her hard and pounded on her pulse, but she did not come to. He touched her arm and shoulder. They felt cold. He grasped the fingers of her hand. They were ice cold and stiff and her heartbeat was no longer audible.

She was dead, and Lloyd heard the screams of war inside his head again. He breathed heavily and grasped her hand for the final time and said, "Goodbye Molly. You were a good friend."

He opened his desk drawer. Next to his medals, he fingered the black-and-white photo of Molly and then mutely kissed it. He treasured the photo more than the medals. Tears were slowly rolling down his cheeks and for the first time in his life he did not try to keep them back.

Lloyd has almost circled the lake when he remembers Molly once saying "Lloyd, it's a tough old world."

He bows his head and doesn't lengthen his stride as the rain comes pouring down.

He thinks to himself, in the imagination anything is possible. He imagines Molly as a spiritual companion buried deep inside himself. All of a sudden he hears her voice: "For God's sake, Lloyd. Get out of the rain!"

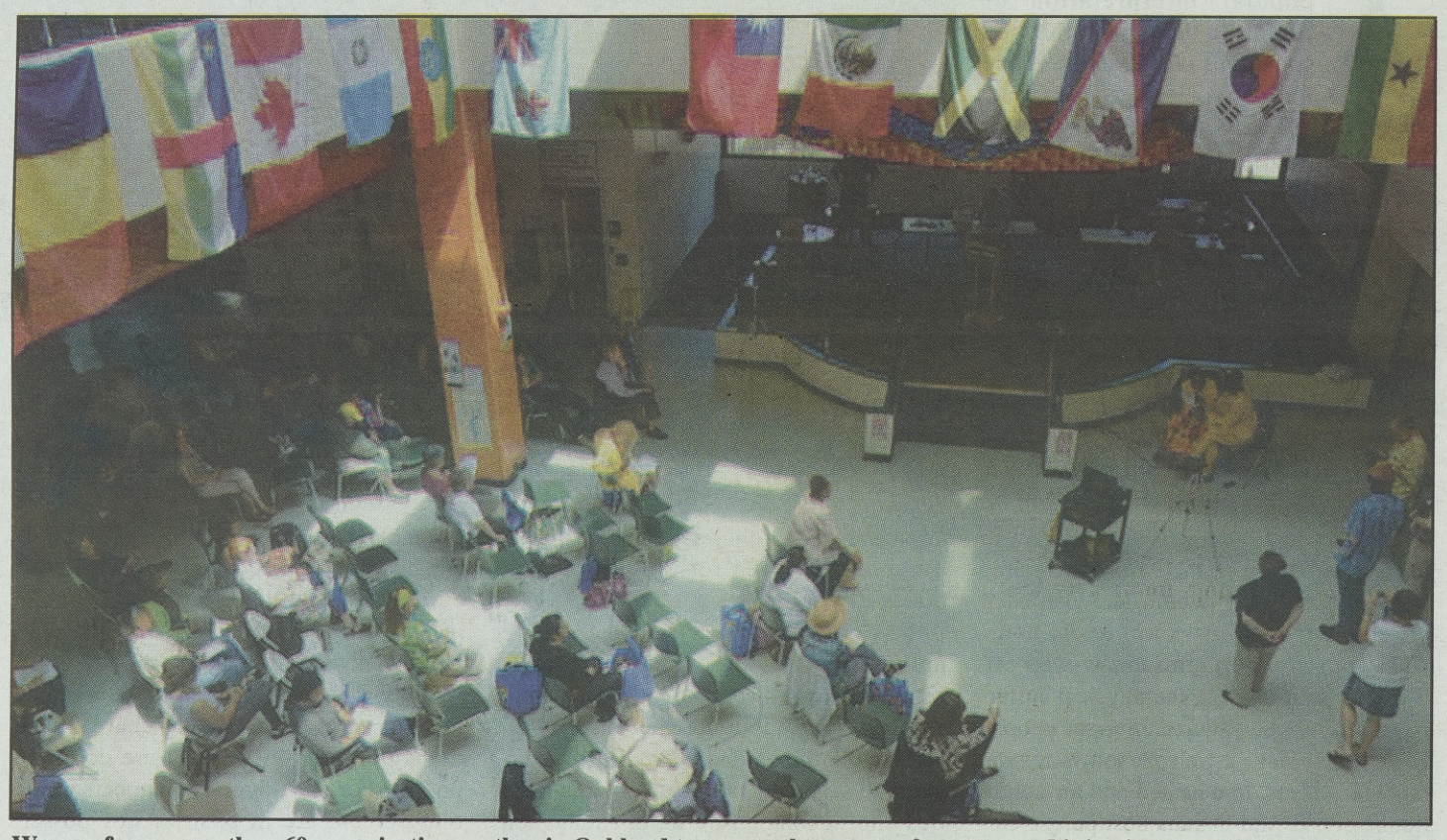
Amid a deep stillness he raises his chin, lengthens his stride and breaks into a run.

'The System Is Broken — The People Are Not'

Courts of Women on Poverty launch a challenge to economic injustice in the U.S.

by Janny Castillo

"We are the community of survivors. We are not the people without a name, without a face, but we are people that will write a history because we have held the seeds for a new way, we have been the healers, we have been the story tellers, and it is that which must be heard now!"
— Corinne Kumar, World Courts founder, speaking at the US Courts of Women on Poverty, Western Region



Women from more than 60 organizations gather in Oakland to expose the causes of poverty and injustice. Jon-Mychal Cox photo

A special gathering on the "US Courts of Women on Poverty, Western Region" was held in Oakland from May 10-13. The gathering generated a thoughtful discourse on viable grassroots solutions to alleviate the effects of poverty in our communities.

The Courts of Women on Poverty were held in Oakland, a city of extreme contrasts — from the hills of green abundance and million-dollar homes to a parking lot at Eastmont Mall, where a homeless woman sleeps in her car with three small children; from the lights and music of downtown Oakland to the graffiti-saturated and litter-filled streets of West Oakland. Oakland was mother to peoples' revolutions way before Occupy tents set up in the town square. It was righteous that WEAP, the Women's Economic Agenda Project, chose Oakland's Laney College as the site for the first US Courts of Women on Poverty.

Corrine Kumar, founder of the World Courts of Women on Poverty, described the purpose of the event. She said, "The courts of women are expressions of a new imaginary refusing that human rights be defined and confined only to that which has been hegemonic. These articulations are finding new ways of speaking truth to power, challenging the different notions of power, recognizing that the concepts and categories enshrined in the ideas and institutions of human rights are insufficient to grasp the violence (of poverty). The courts are creating another civic authority."

Corrine Kumar, along with The Asian Women's Human Rights Council and El Taller International, and a large collaboration of networks in different countries, have organized over 30 courts globally.

Organizations from across the United States sent representatives to the gathering, including Philadelphia's Poor People's Economic Rights Campaign, Portland's Sisters of the Road, Women's Economic Advocacy Project (WEAP), the Alameda County Community Food Bank, Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency (BOSS), Hip Hop Congress, Lifetime, SEIU Local 1021 and St. Mary's Center. These were a few of more than 60 organizations that helped plan this "history-making" four-day event.

Ethel Long Scott, WEAP's executive director, said, "There has never been a time in this country of such tremendous opportunities and tremendous disparities. There is nothing quite like this globalization of capitalism. We at WEAP have a focus on making economic security and justice available to large numbers of people across this globe and. most particularly. in this country. We have this idea that *poverty is violence*! We are dedicated to not only elevating the national discourse, but also advancing the vision of the need for economic human rights. (We're) dedicated to achieving a few small things: accessible, comprehensive health care for all, from birth to death, and a living wage so that we might thrive and not simply survive."

The Court brought together experts from the different perspectives of the Economic Equity movement. Keynote speakers included Kay McMay, former president of the California Nurses Association, Richard Monje, international vice-president of Workers United, and community activist Emma Denice Milligan, teacher and writer for WEAP.

The truth-sayers and heart of the event were the personal and video testimonies of those affected by poverty, unemployment, homelessness and suffering from an inadequate health care system. The gathering reached consensus in declaring, *"The system is broken. The people are not."*

The panelists spotlighted the scope of the problem and solutions to core issues such as poverty, jobs and immigration, foreclosures, homelessness and poverty rights, environment and the justice system, healthcare for the 99% and organizing for a quality public education.

Ashley Proctor, a panelist on "Healthcare for the 99%," shared her story. Ashley has a disease which has deteriorated her throat system. Beginning at age 10, she went undiagnosed for 12 years. She saw 34 doctors who told her, without looking down her throat, that there was nothing wrong with her. She remembers, at age 22, sharing baby food with her son, because that was all she could eat.

"One day a lady at my church told me I was too skinny and that I was going to die," she said. The lady, who was a nurse, took one look and recommended an upper GI exam. After the procedure, the doctor was amazed that Ashley was still talking. " I weighed 97 pounds," Ashley said. "My glands were permanently swollen and the inside of my throat no longer existed."

On the same panel, Vanessa Nguyen, BOSS community organizer and Suitcase Clinic volunteer, talked about her experience. She said, "Folks in poverty are living in neighborhoods with tons of violence, walking home is stressful, scary, dangerous. Stress causes a slew of health issues, like stress-eating, smoking, drugs. Health and poverty are intertwined."

Song, dance and poetry textured the days with color, great music and rich culture. Many times, the audience was brought to their feet in applause from performances by Antique Naked Soul, Las Bomberas de la Bahia, DeLabrie, Mamaz, Rahman Jamaal, Shamako Nobel, Revolutionary Poets Brigade and Youth Speaks.

On day two, BOSS director boona cheema led a California Partnership press conference, and Oakland Mayor Jean Quan spoke in support.

On day three, Rep. Barbara Lee shared that there is a serious push to cut billions of dollars from food stamp programs and from the Preventive Health Care Fund, a fund that helps women. Rep. Lee said, "Women of the world unite! Women's leadership really defines whether the world will move forward or go backwards."

The court culminated in a presentation by the jurors who were charged to witness the proceedings and draft a resolution that will be shared with three other courts in planning stages in other parts of the United States. Ultimately, a U.S. contingent will present a U.S. Courts of Women on Poverty Resolution at the Geneva United Nations Human Rights Council.

Here is an excerpt from the Juror Resolution: "The hurt heart, the damaged spirit must have a place to heal. The US Courts of Women on Poverty has created the space for this unstoppable healing to begin.... We, the Jurors of the US Courts of Women on Poverty, on this day which is Mother's Day, bear witness to the suffering of our mothers and the pain of our sons and daughters. We bear witness to the violence of battery, criminal injustice, homelessness, mental illness and physical violence, food insecurity and economical genocide — indeed, the extreme violence perpetrated by poverty and the capitalist system....

"We, the Jurors of the US Courts of Women on Poverty, Western Region, hold the United States Government and corporations responsible and accountable for the multitude of gross human rights violations that have barred the way to basic human rights such as affordable housing, health and mental health care, quality education, right to justice and dignity, and the right to exist and thrive in a free and true democracy."

Special thanks are due to WEAP and Ethel Long-Scott for taking the lead on organizing the first World Courts on Women ever held in the United States.

In the inspiring words of Corrine Kumar: "We ask the powerful of the world, the giant multinationals, the rich in the richest country of the world, we ask you to look into the eyes of your children. What stories will you tell them? Will you tell them that once upon a time, not so long ago, when millions of people in America were living on the streets, when millions did not have health care, or food, housing or work, when millions of poor people have fallen through the holes in the safety net, that they, The Powerful, only looked away? Will you tell them you had no answers and accepted only violent ones? ... What will you tell your children?"

Janny Castillo is a community organizer at BOSS in Berkeley, and was a juror at the Oakland gathering of the US Courts of Women on Poverty, Western Region.

We Looked Like Flowers

Song by Carol Denney

we looked like flowers
when we were young
we looked like angels
every one
our skin was beautiful
our eyes were bright
we sleep in doorways
night after night

asking for handouts
is no one's desire
makes you so small inside
makes you so tired
just have to roll with whatever goes by
and want to surrender
and just want to die

we built all the bridges
we fought all the wars
now it's just sirens
the slamming of doors
the slamming of jail cells
again and again
once we were soldiers
once we were workers
now we're just them

they look at our clothing
they look at our shoes
our troubles and stories
are yesterday's news
if we were puppies
they'd throw us a bone
if we were children
they'd take us all home

wish I had wings
wish I could fly
make me a home somewhere
up in the sky
where nobody hates
where nobody stares
where somebody listens
where somebody cares

night after night
day after day
looking for mercy
to meet us halfway
they want us to leave
but where do we go
we are just people
they don't want to know